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AMENDMENTS

In the Claims:

Please amend claims 1-2, 6-9, 16, 18, 22, 29-31, 38 and 40-41, and please add new claims 42-58, as shown below. Note that, for some amended claims, double-strikeout is used to show deletion of text, instead of single-strikeout, in order to avoid confusion involving deletion of any hyphens.

1. (currently amended) A decorative hard coating comprising metal-rich zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride.

2. (currently amended) A decorative hard coating comprising zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride, The the decorative hard coating ~~as in claim 1,~~ having a CIELAB color of 'L' of at least about 76, '|a|' of at most about one, and '|b|' of at most about five.

9 3. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 2, having a Vickers hardness of at least about 15 GPa.

4. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 1, having a CIELAB color of 'L' of at least about 76, '|a|' of at most about one, and '|b|' of at most about four.

5. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 1, having a Vickers hardness of at least about 15 GPa.

6. (currently amended) The A decorative hard coating comprising zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride as in claim 1, having a lower atomic concentration of aluminium than of zirconium.

7. (currently amended) The A decorative hard coating comprising zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride as in claim 1, wherein atomic concentration of aluminium is less than about one fifth that of zirconium.

8. (currently amended) The A decorative hard coating comprising zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride as in claim 1, having relative atomic concentrations of Zr:Al:N:O:C of approximately 56:10:23:7:4.

9. (currently amended) The decorative hard coating as in claim 1, overlying a substrate, wherein the decorative hard coating further comprises an intermediate layer of a metal, alloy or metal-rich metal oxycarbonitride.

10. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 1, wherein constituents of the decorative hard coating have varying relative concentrations through the thickness of the coating.

11. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 1, overlying a substrate of metal, plastic, or ceramic.

12. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 1, deposited by evaporation, arc deposition, sputtering, or a combination thereof.

13. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 1, having a thickness between about 0.2 micron to about 3 microns.

14. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 13, wherein the decorative hard coating consists substantially of zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride.

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15. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 1, overlying a user-visible portion of a household appliance, an automobile part, a kitchen or bathroom accessory, a watch, or jewellery.

16. (currently amended) A coated article comprising a substrate and a decorative hard coating above the substrate that comprises metal-rich oxycarbonitrides of zirconium and aluminium.

17. (original) The coated article as in claim 16, wherein the coated article is a household appliance, an automobile part, a kitchen or bathroom accessory, a watch, or jewellery.

18. (currently amended) A decorative hard coating comprising an aluminium or metal-rich aluminium-~~rich~~ oxycarbonitride layer on a metal-rich zirconium-~~rich~~ oxycarbonitride layer.

19. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 18, wherein the zirconium-rich oxycarbonitride layer has a CIELAB '|b|' value of greater than about five, and the overall decorative hard coating has a CIELAB '|b|' value of at most about five.

20. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 18, having a CIELAB color of 'L' of at least about 76, '|a|' of at most about 1, and '|b|' of at most about five.

21. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 18, having a Vickers hardness of at least about 15 GPa.

22. (currently amended) A decorative hard coating comprising an overlayer comprising aluminium or aluminium metal-rich aluminium oxycarbonitride or aluminium-zirconium oxycarbonitride, the overlayer layer overlying a ~~stainless steel~~ metal-rich metal oxycarbonitride layer.

23. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 22, having a CIELAB color of 'L' of at least about 76, '|a|' of at most about 1, and '|b|' of at most about five.

24. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 22, having a Vickers hardness of at least about 15 GPa.

25. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 22, applied to a substrate and further comprising a layer of metal, alloy, or metal oxycarbonitride.

26. (original) A decorative hard coating comprising an underlayer and an overlayer, wherein the underlayer comprises metal-rich oxycarbonitride, and the overlayer comprises aluminium in some form.

27. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, wherein the underlayer has a CIELAB color value '|b|' of greater than about five, and the decorative hard coating has a CIELAB color value '|b|' of at most about five.

28. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, wherein the overlayer comprises aluminium in the form of aluminium oxycarbonitride or metallic aluminium.

29. (currently amended) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, wherein the metal-rich oxycarbonitride ~~is comprises~~ comprises zirconium-~~rich~~ oxycarbonitride.

30. (currently amended) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, wherein the metal-rich oxycarbonitride comprises zirconium-~~rich~~ oxycarbonitride or stainless steel-~~rich oxycarbonitride~~.

31. (currently amended) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, wherein the overlayer consists substantially of aluminium or metal-rich aluminium-~~rich~~

oxycarbonitride, and the underlayer consists substantially of metal-rich oxycarbonitride.

32. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, having thickness of about 0.2 micron to about 3 microns.

33. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, wherein the underlayer has a CIELAB '|b|' value of greater than about five, and the decorative hard coating has a CIELAB '|b|' value of at most about five.

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34. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, having a CIELAB color of 'L' of at least about 76, '|a|' of at most about 1, and '|b|' of at most about five.

35. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, having a Vickers hardness of at least about 15 GPa.

36. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, having a Vickers hardness of at least about 15 GPa and a CIELAB color of 'L' of at least about 76, '|a|' of at most about 1, and '|b|' of at most about five; wherein the underlayer has a CIELAB 'b' value of greater than about five.

37. (original) The decorative hard coating as in claim 26, deposited on a substrate by evaporation, arc deposition, sputtering, or a combination thereof.

38. (currently amended) A method of making a metallic white decorative coating comprising:
providing a substrate; and
forming a layer of zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride over the substrate, the layer having a lower atomic concentration of aluminium than of zirconium.

39. (original) The method according to claim 38, wherein the forming step comprises arc depositing zirconium and magnetron sputtering of aluminium, with a gas mixture of argon, nitrogen, oxygen, and acetylene.

40. (currently amended) A method of making a metallic white decorative coating comprising:
providing a substrate;
forming ~~a layer of an underlayer, comprising metal-rich oxycarbonitride,~~ over the substrate; and
forming ~~a layer of an overlayer, comprising aluminium or aluminium metal-rich aluminium oxycarbonitride over the underlayer layer of metal-rich oxycarbonitride.~~

41. (currently amended) The method according to claim 40, wherein the step of forming the underlayer ~~layer of metal-rich oxycarbonitride~~ comprises depositing zirconium and aluminium, with a gas mixture including at least nitrogen.

42. (new) The method according to claim 40, wherein the metallic white coating has a CIELAB color of 'L' of at least about 76, '|a|' of at most about one, and '|b|' of at most about five.

43. (new) A method of producing an article that is coated according to the method according to claim 40, the producing method comprising the providing step and the forming steps, wherein the providing step comprises providing, as the substrate, an article to be coated.

44. (new) A coated article produced according to the producing method according to claim 43.

45. (new) A method of forming a decorative coating on a substrate, the method comprising:

forming a metal-rich layer over the substrate, the metal-rich layer comprising zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride.

46. (new) The method according to claim 45, wherein the forming step comprises forming the metal-rich layer using physical vapor deposition.

47. (new) The method according to claim 45, wherein the layer has a CIELAB color of 'L' of at least about 76, '|a|' of at most about one, and '|b|' of at most about four.

48. (new) A method of producing an article that is coated according to the method according to claim 45, the producing method comprising:

providing, as the substrate, an article to be coated;
and
the forming step.

49. (new) A coated article produced according to the producing method according to claim 48.

50. (new) A method of forming a decorative coating on a substrate, the method comprising:

forming a layer comprising zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride having a CIELAB color of 'L' of at least about 76, '|a|' of at most about one, and '|b|' of at most about five.

51. (new) A bathroom accessory or article of jewellery, a user-visible portion of which is coated with the decorative hard coating according to claim 1.

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cont. 52. (new) A decorative hard coating according to claim 2, wherein the zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride comprises metal-rich zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride.

53. (new) A decorative hard coating according to claim 6, wherein the zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride comprises metal-rich zirconium-aluminium oxycarbonitride.

54. (new) An article coated with the decorative hard coating according to claim 6.

55. (new) The coated article as in claim 16, wherein the coated article comprises a bathroom accessory, a watch, or jewellery.

56. (new) The method according to claim 38, wherein the forming step comprises employing physical vapor deposition.

57. (new) The method according to claim 38, wherein the layer has a CIELAB color of 'L' of at least about 76, '|a|' of at most about one, and '|b|' of at most about five.

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58. (new) An article coated according to the method according to claim 38.
